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SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

**Government Administration and Elections
Committee Public Hearing
March 3, 2014
Testimony**

Good Morning Chairman Musto, Chairman Jutila, and members of the GAE Committee. For the record, my name is Denise Merrill and I am Secretary of the State of Connecticut. There are many bills on your agenda today, and many bills that affect the conduct and administration of elections in our state. I will make some brief comments on a few bills before you today. And I will be happy to take questions afterwards.

First, House Bill 5360. This bill is put forward by my agency.

The bill resolves the inconsistent requirements between minor and major party candidates for municipal and state offices. Currently, because of a change made in 2011, the minor party candidates are required to sign a certification of their endorsement

This is contained in General Statutes 9-462, incidentally there is a small typo in the drafting of this legislation and it refers to statute number 9-262 as requiring the signatures when in fact it is 9-462.

The signature is not required of major party candidates running for the same local office as the minor party candidates.

We have proposed this bill because of confusion created in 2013 when minor party candidates did not realize that a change in the law in 2011 required their signature on endorsement paperwork. In some cases the inconsistency of the signature requirement between major and minor parties led well-intentioned clerks to give incorrect guidance. In other cases candidates, many who had run before, were unaware of the new legal requirement.

These minor party candidates who thought they were endorsed –some of whom had won local elections for years – were consequently not put on the ballot, and had to seek injunctions in court in order get reinstated to the ballot. I feel strongly about everyone's right to have ballot access and I'm sure you do too.

My proposal would establish parity between major party candidates and minor party candidates; regardless of whether they are running for local or state office they should be required to sign a certification of endorsement. By applying the same standard to everyone I think we will minimize this kind of confusion from here on.

Only endorsement paperwork with the signatures from the candidates themselves will constitute an official endorsement.

If this bill is enacted, major and minor party endorsed candidates will both have to sign the certificate or letter of endorsement themselves prior to submission to the town clerk.

I hope that you will agree and vote favorably.

As you may or may not know, there is another piece of legislation with the same stated goal as house bill, that is Senate Bill number 274. This would eliminate any signature requirement from endorsed candidates of any party.

This would do away with the disparity in requirements for endorsed candidates of minor and major parties. However, I don't support this concept for the simple reason that the requirement to have a candidate's signature on endorsement paperwork serves an important purpose.

This was done to ensure that no party can endorse a candidate without their knowledge or consent, which was actually done in the past, and was the reason for the law changing in 2011.

So while I don't support removing the signature requirement for endorsed candidates entirely, I do support the reform proposed in House Bill 5360 which would equalize what we ask of minor and major party candidates.

So again I urge passage.

The next bill I would like to address is Raised Bill 5278: An Act Concerning Mandatory Registrar of Voter Sessions.

Currently, there are three dates that require Registrars of Voters to be in their office and available to serve the public. Those dates are the 14th day before the Primary, the third Saturday before Election Day, and the seventh day before Election Day.

Just so everyone is clear, let me remind you about the current voter registration deadlines.

To register using the mail-in registration form or the online system your registration must be received 2 weeks before Election Day. In a Primary the mail-in registration form or online voter registration must be received 5 days before the Primary. If you register to vote in person you must be registered by one week before Election Day, or in the case of a Primary you have up until the day before.

Then there are 6 days when the only people who can register are those that acquired eligibility after the cut off date. Or, for example, the person turned 18, became a citizen or moved into the town. But otherwise the public can't register until Election Day itself, when you can use our Election Day Registration process. But Election Day registration only applies in the general election.

Perhaps the sponsors of this bill think that the new online voter registration and Election Day registration alleviates the need for these mandatory voter registration sessions. However, it is my opinion that the first objective is to have a smooth, well-run election.

Election Day registration is an important new policy for our state, but it cannot replace the need for advanced planning. Relying too heavily on Election Day Registration to pick up the slack would only necessitate more staffing and longer lines.

This bill would keep the mandatory registration session 14 days in advance of a primary but eliminate the two sessions before the general election (3rd Saturday before Election Day and 7th day before Election Day).

Whatever the committee chooses to do with the first two mandatory sessions, I would suggest leaving in place the mandatory session 7 days before the General Election. I think we should keep that in place because that is the absolute last day to register in advance and in the interest of democracy I would support that we should all make the greatest effort to serve the public.

If those changes can be made I would be happy to support this bill. Thank you and at this point I am happy to answer any questions.